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Making Common Cause for Conservation: The Pinchot Institute and Grey Towers National Historic Site, 1963-2013

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Pinchot Institute for Conservation and the donation of the Pinchot family home Grey Towers to the U.S. Forest Service. In the following essay, historian and Pinchot biographer Char Miller discusses how the Institute is applying Gifford Pinchot's principles to contemporary environmental issues. It is adapted from Seeking the Greatest Good:

The Conservation Legacy of Gifford Pinchot, his new history of the Institute, and is published with kind permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

MAKING COMMON CAUSE FOR CONSERVATION

*THE PINCHOT INSTITUTE AND GREY TOWERS
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, 1963–2013*

“**T**he challenge, and it will continue to be a challenge, is how do we keep things in balance. How do we support a community, how do we keep an industry alive, and then how do we do that in a sustainable fashion so that at the end of the day your ecosystem remains intact.” —*Catherine Mater*¹

It comes down to the land, its health and viability, its capacity to regenerate and sustain its ecological relationships, and its integrity. If salubrious and energetic, then the communities depending on the land—biotic and human—will flourish. If not, then the consequences could be destabilizing.

That was the message Gifford Pinchot's parents conveyed to

him on his 21st birthday when they presented him with a copy of George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature*, a clarion call for an informed, conservation stewardship that James and Mary Pinchot promised to enact on the many cutover acres surrounding their just-opened Grey Towers estate in Milford, Pennsylvania. Aldo Leopold made a similar claim in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)

BY CHAR MILLER



FOREST HISTORY SOCIETY PHOTO COLLECTION: FH86520

President Kennedy waving to the crowd during the Pinchot Institute dedication ceremony at Grey Towers. Chief Ed Cliff stands behind the podium.

about the pressing need for a self-conscious ethic, the best definition of which, he suspected, was “written not with a pen, but with an axe. It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or deciding what to chop. A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land.” This sensitive engagement required as well a sense of one’s small place within the long sweep of time, an insight Leopold voiced in 1907 while participating in the Yale Forest School summer camp at Grey Towers; he was happy to “pick up the axe again,” he wrote his mother, and “while I am biting into the heart of a big pine or chestnut, to think that each chip is like a chip cut out of the interval between Now and Then.” Some of those intervals are more pivotal than others, President John F. Kennedy asserted in 1963 as he accepted Grey Towers on behalf of a grateful nation and dedicated the Pinchot Institute for Conservation to carry on the conscientious work the Pinchot family had been pursuing since the late 1880s. As the president noted, there are eras that especially require the presence of purposeful actors, and the early 1960s appeared to be one of them: “For our industrial



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economy and urbanization are pressing against the limits of our most fundamental needs: pure water to drink, fresh air to breathe, open space to enjoy, and abundant sources of energy to release man from menial toil.”²

Figuring out how American society could resolve these inter-related challenges was the Pinchot Institute’s original mission, a mission that was not always realized during its first three decades of existence. Once a unit of the U.S. Forest Service, and thus sub-

ject to the vagaries of congressional funding and shifts in agency focus, it is now a nonprofit think-and-do tank working in close partnership with Grey Towers and the Forest Service, a collaborative model that since the early 1990s has allowed it to come more into its own. Its success in

this regard, I argue in my new book, *Seeking the Greatest Good: The Conservation Legacy of Gifford Pinchot*, which probes the organization’s activism over the past half-century, has been an innovative effort to devise, implement, and assess strategies for carrying out cooperative conservationism on federal, state, tribal, and private lands—and even abroad—with the goal of ensuring ecological resilience across time.³

GREY TOWERS PROTOCOLS

That aspiration dates back to 1991, when a small gathering of “farmers and philosophers, foresters and theologians” met at Grey Towers because they “wanted to look over the edge, into the distance to see if we could come up with some common ideas about future stewardship of the land.” Out of their concerted efforts emerged the Grey Towers Protocols, a set of principles that were designed to speak to what its authors believed was the third stage in the “history of Americans’ relationship to their lands and natural resources.” The first—the getting and taking—had led to the violent subordination of native peoples and the equally devastating and rapid clearing away of forests and other resources to fuel what in time became the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century. The second had been born in response to the first: as habitats disappeared, hunters and anglers fought to protect woodland, meadow, and marsh; as large mammals and avian life were extirpated, in their defense women and men banded together to form the Audubon Society and similar grassroots organizations; and local needs for clean water or flood protection or fire control led still others to advocate for national forests, parks, and refuges. One result of this agitation was the passage of the Creative Act of 1891, which marked the creation of the nation’s first forest reserves (later renamed national forests). This law’s centennial, and a reappraisal of its significance, had brought the conferees to Grey Towers to hammer out a new approach to resource management for a new century.⁴

Out of their deliberations emerged the four main planks of the Grey Towers Protocols⁵:

1. Land stewardship must be more than good “scientific management”; it must be a moral imperative.
2. Management activities must be within the physical and biological capabilities of the land, based on comprehensive, up-to-date resource information and a thorough scientific understanding of the ecosystem’s functioning and response.
3. The intent of management, as well as monitoring and reporting, should be making progress toward desired future resource conditions, not achieving specific near-term resource output targets.
4. Stewardship means passing the land and resources, including intact, functioning forest ecosystems, to the next generation in better condition than they were found.

The Pinchot Institute adopted these principles as its guiding philosophy, an embrace that was not coincidental—V. Alaric Sample, then on the staff of the Conservation Foundation and later to become the Pinchot Institute for Conservation’s executive director, served as the conference amanuensis and authored its summative essay, *Land Stewardship in the Next Era of Conservation*.

The new focus on ecosystems as the baseline for management came with a significant challenge: would these principles work on the ground in real time? Ecosystem management, in short, may be a scientific notation but its success depends as much on site-specific biota as it does on place-based human concerns that are social, economic, and cultural in origin and articulation. This meld added a political dimension and aspirational component to the work to come, for as “important as these principles might be in guiding the physical activities of resource managers on the land,” Sample observed, “they may be even more valuable as a means for resource managers to communicate a vision of stewardship and personal responsibility to society at large, helping a



President Kennedy prepares to unveil the dedication plaque. From left: Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman, Forest Service Chief Edward Cliff, President John F. Kennedy, Gifford Bryce Pinchot, and Pennsylvania Governor William W. Scranton.

fragmented public to recognize that our economic well-being as well as our environmental health rests on our being able to pull together rather than pull apart.”⁶

Trying to stitch together the American polity has been a difficult, onerous, and not always fruitful operation, but that did not and does not mean the effort is misguided—just that it has been and will remain incomplete. More measurable and perhaps more fulfilling has been the work itself, as suggested in four case studies of the Pinchot Institute’s projects in forested watersheds in North and South America. Each initiative has responded to the ethos embedded in the Grey Towers Protocols. Each is committed to resolving a local, land-based community need. Each has attempted to develop a broad coalition in its support. Because these projects are often operating under the radar and on private lands, their managers, researchers, and supporters have been able to develop their objectives outside the oft-contentious national debates about economic development versus environmental protection. As these initiatives have been transplanted from their sites of origin, they are helping to make less central those furious arguments that since the late 1960s frequently have defined the American environmental culture.⁷



COURTESY OF SANDRA ANAGNOSTAKIS

The bur of the American chestnut, seen open here. The Pinchot Institute is one of several organizations working to reintroduce the tree.

A NEW PINCHOT ERA BEGINS

That a Pinchot is involved in two of these projects offers a compelling storyline. It is just not a role that Peter Pinchot thought would be his. “For the first thirty years of my life, I resisted a Pinchot career in forestry,” he confessed in a 1999 speech to the National Leadership Team of the U.S. Forest Service. “It seemed far too daunting to be in my grandfather’s shadow. But eventually the green conservation blood got the best of me.” In 1997 he completed a master’s degree in forestry at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, which his progenitors had established. When, two years later, he officially joined the Society of American Foresters, an institution his grandfather Gifford Pinchot had also founded, he laughed: “My last defense was punctured. I am afraid I am a fallen man.”⁸

What he fell into was the felt need to reconceive conservation from the ground up. His reconceptualization would take into account the late-twentieth-century shift away from a commodity-based approach often associated with his grandfather’s defining notion of the foresters’ creed: “The greatest good of the greatest number in the long run.” It would make use, too, of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, which depended on an alteration in the “role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member of it.” Taking seriously the fundamental change in the relationship between Americans and nature was an essential precondition to rethinking how the Forest Service might better steward the national forests and grasslands. By the mid-1960s, Peter Pinchot argued,

most Americans were “living in urban and suburban areas and had little daily dependence on nature for their livelihood” and thus had “no direct exposure to the raw products of forests”; for them, the “idea of managing forests for a sustainable flow of commodities no longer had much personal meaning.” These urbanites found more resonant the new environmental ethos pitting “environmental protection and wilderness preservation against the economic thrust of natural resource productivity.”⁹

Pinchot was not the first to argue that this dynamic had put the Forest Service on the defensive. The resolution he proposed to the agency’s leaders—that it use the 193 million acres under its stewardship to protect the planet’s diminishing biodiversity and provide ways for city residents “to reconnect to the wildness of real natural landscapes”—was also in line with then-Chief Michael Dombeck’s convictions. One of the chief’s goals, dubbed “forest to faucet,” had been developed to enhance citizens’ realization of how deeply connected they were to the forested watersheds that supplied much of their potable water (in the American West, for instance, upwards of 30 percent of water supplies flow off national forests and grasslands). “We can leave no greater gift for our children,” Dombeck asserted, or “show no greater respect for our forefathers, than to leave [the] watersheds entrusted to our care healthier, more diverse and more productive.” What Peter Pinchot brought to the twenty-year conversation about how the Forest Service might regain its one-time relevance and centrality was the argument for a communitarian approach to landscape management.¹⁰

This new paradigm called on foresters “to reexamine some of our core assumptions.” To reduce the pressure on forests “while we develop the scientific knowledge of how to preserve biodiversity in working landscapes,” Pinchot urged his professional peers to push the wood products industry to develop sustainable substitutes for “virgin wood fiber for reading materials, house construction, and packaging.” Coupled with that charge was a more radical argument. The “model of multiple-use may have outlived its utility,” he affirmed, especially when logging would devastate already-identified “biodiversity hotspots, where a majority of the world’s species are found.” Pinchot proposed developing a zoned approach to timber management. Taking biodiversity-rich areas completely out of production and transferring that work to locales “of low priority for biodiversity conservation,” where it would be possible to “maximize fiber production to meet economic demands,” made good sense. Recognizing too that private lands must also contribute to this recovery process, he suggested that it would be critical to develop “community-based programs that would provide incentives for neighboring landholders to restore and sustain species diversity on their lands.”¹¹

REGENERATING THE MILFORD EXPERIMENTAL FOREST

It was in that latter context that Peter Pinchot would test his arguments. Teaming up with his family, and with financial support and technical advice from the Forest Service and the Pinchot Institute, he returned to the Milford Experimental Forest that his great-grandfather James Pinchot had established at Grey Towers in 1903 to facilitate the field training of Yale forestry students. As reconceived in 1999, the site’s mission targeted ecological restoration and community forestry. This orientation was a result of two central concerns that Pinchot and his collaborators hoped to address. Milford and the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania were quickly becoming a site for second homes, whose construction was fragmenting large ownerships and eroding the area’s biodiversity. This demographic and biological challenge came coupled with a political one—how to engage residents old and new, year-round and seasonal, about the need to preserve the “esthetics and environmental quality of the region” that the growing tourist and recreational economy both depended on and threatened. Given that “there are probably only one or two decades of opportunity to conserve enough of the landscape in blocks of continuous forestland to sustain the diversity and richness of the forest and river ecosystems,” the Pinchot family placed a conservation easement on the bulk of its 1,400 acres, including the experimental forest, along the Sawkill River. Doing so allowed the Pinchots to “stimulate a regional dialog about stewardship and to create a pattern of collaboration between private and public landowners that can begin to reverse the trend towards fragmentation of the forest.”¹²

As transformative were the management strategies Peter Pinchot established for the site. Among the problems confronting eastern woodlands were overabundant white-tailed deer, which in Milford as elsewhere had cleared away the forest understory. A two-year deer population study recommended a “large, managed hunt” to cull the herds on the property. Aware that the experimental forest could not solve the deer problem on its lands alone, Pinchot worked with scientists at Pennsylvania State University, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and local hunting clubs “to develop a community-based deer management program with



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Leila Pinchot, great-granddaughter of Gifford Pinchot, at a chestnut restoration planting on the Beaver Run Hunting and Fishing Club, a Common Waters Fund site in Pennsylvania.

adjacent private and public landowners so that we can collectively manage deer at the landscape scale.”¹³

Reintroducing the American chestnut locally has led to the creation of a similarly broad network of allies. The Forest Service and the Pinchot Institute, as well as the American Chestnut Foundation and the Connecticut Agricultural Research Station, have contributed time and expertise to the Pinchot family’s effort to bring back what had been the area’s dominant tree species, and whose nuts once lay thick on the ground. But sometime around 1900, the chestnut blight fungus (*Diaporthe parasitica*) was brought to North America and began to decimate the species; it continues to thwart efforts to return to the canopy a species once praised as the sequoia of the East. That moniker also has been a source of hope. Because the American chestnut “is a charismatic species,” Peter Pinchot suggests, “the act of its restoration can help catalyze community stewardship of the regional forest.”¹⁴

At the Milford Experimental Forest, the restoration effort has taken a two-pronged approach: the development of an Asian-American hybrid chestnut bred to be blight resistant, scientific experimentation that the American Chestnut Foundation and the Connecticut Agricultural Research Station conducted. The second critical need has been to figure out how to reintroduce this species into the mature eastern forests from which the chestnut has been absent for a century or more. Early tests at Milford demonstrated how difficult this process would be. White-tailed deer browsed on chestnut seedlings and sprouts and the blight continued to cut back the regenerative capacity of older trees. Subsequent efforts

appear to be more a bit more successful, as fencing and hunting have kept deer populations under control. Harvesting of sunlight-blocking maples has opened up the canopy and other silvicultural treatments are being assessed for their efficacy. Among those doing this vital assessment work is Leila Pinchot, Peter Pinchot's daughter, another forestry graduate from Yale. After completing her PhD at the University of Tennessee in 2011, she was hired by the Forest Service and the Pinchot Institute to conduct an ongoing series of chestnut restoration experiments in the Milford forest. This acorn did not fall too far from the family tree.¹⁵

SECURING BETTER HEALTH CARE IN ECUADOR

David Smith, who had conducted some of the initial restoration studies on the Milford Experimental Forest, decided to transplant the Pinchot family restoration work abroad. When he left Pennsylvania in 2001 to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer in the northwestern Ecuadoran community of Cristóbal Colón, set within in the wet, tropical foothills of the Andes, he carried with him Gifford Pinchot's *Primer of Forestry* (1899). Among that text's central points was the enduring impact that "destructive lumbering" can have on sustained forestry. It injures young growth, Pinchot wrote, "provokes and feeds fires," and can "annihilate the productive capacity of forest land for tens or scores of years to come." To counter this destructive process required the adoption of more conservative methods of forestry "to draw from the forest, while protecting it, the best return of which it is capable of giving."¹⁶

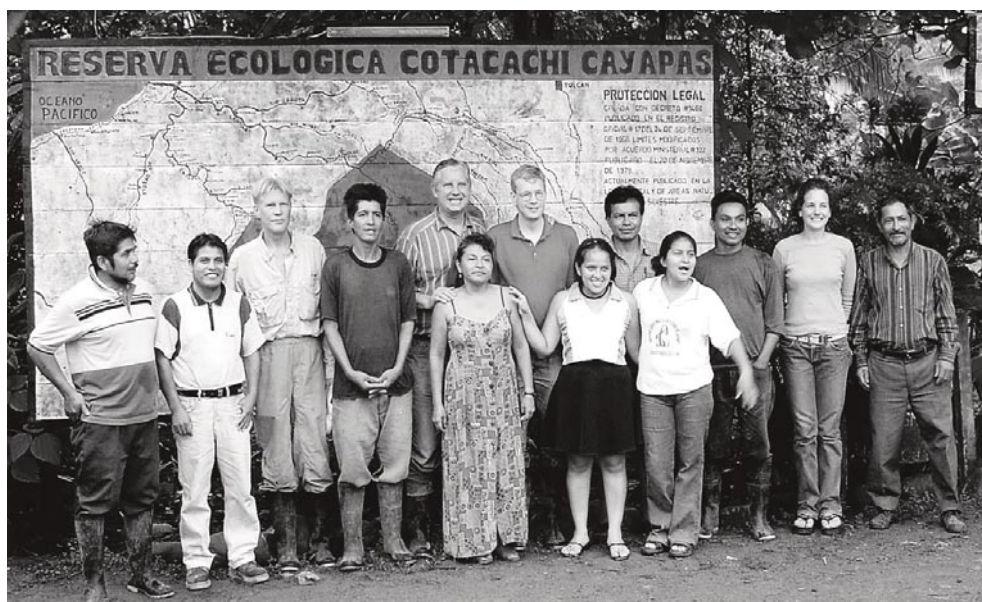
The conditions Smith encountered on the ground in Ecuador seemed similar to those Pinchot had encountered in the American West a century earlier. Home to 300 families that own more than 100,000 wooded acres in the Rio Canandé watershed, Cristóbal Colón is a poor town in good measure because its residents are unable to sustainably manage their timber resources. Smith's economic analyses indicated that commercial agents were paying roughly 10 cents per foot for rough boards: "Even when farmers cut as many trees as they can, their families still make considerably less than \$1,000 per year selling their lumber wholesale." This exploitation of people and land was compounded by forest clearing, which left behind unstable soil on treeless slopes; subsequent erosion undercut the families' ability to supplement their income through agriculture. Hoping to restore the ecosystems and the community's economic viability, Smith reached out to the Pinchot family. Peter and his family began working in Cristóbal Colón to knit together an international coalition. The Pinchot Institute, the U.S. Peace Corps, the U.S. Forest Service, and Fundación Jutan Sacha, the largest nongovernmental conservation organization in Ecuador, collaborated with this isolated rural community to "sustain forestlands in that region and spark economic development."¹⁷

Community leaders, Peace Corps volunteers, and Pinchot Institute staff at the founding of the EcoMadera community forestry project in Ecuador. Peter Pinchot is in the center.



The EcoMadera project is in the town of Cristóbal Colón, which sits in the foothills of the Andes Mountains.

From this collaboration emerged a fundraising effort that purchased "appropriately scaled tools to allow the community to begin producing finished wood products," among them a portable bandsaw that increased the marketable yield from each tree cut (and thus decreased the number that needed to be harvested). In addition to requisite technical training, the cooperating institutions have provided education in marketing, business management, and wood products development. Through the 2004 establishment of



a communally owned corporation, EcoMadera Verde, Cristóbal Colón's residents began to turn out hardwood flooring, molding, and furniture, all higher-end products generating more profit than sawn boards. In subsequent years, the focus has shifted to creating balsa wood products, and Peter Pinchot has been particularly interested in the manufacture and sale of wood blades for wind-energy turbines. "By creating many new community jobs and providing families with a market for sustainably produced timber," Pinchot wrote in language his grandfather would have approved, "EcoMadera is creating an economic alternative to pervasive forest exploitation."¹⁸

Recovering the viability of the Rio Verde Canandé's forested watershed has been bound up with a concerted effort to sustain its residents' health. Much of the initial work revolved around developing a more sustainable economic market for forest products. But rural poverty also has health care implications. For many in Cristóbal Colón, "the forest serves as a kind of health insurance": when one of its 3,000 residents "becomes sick or suffers an accident, the forest resources are harvested to pay for medical care." Data from a survey, developed in conjunction with residents, revealed high child mortality rates and widespread malaria, typhoid, dysentery, and other diseases, often alongside malnutrition. Securing better health care was hindered by a series of interlocking geographic, economic, and social barriers: the Rio Canandé watershed had no health care workers or clinics, the nearest medical facility was eight miles distant, and that clinic itself was understaffed and underresourced.

In 2008 EcoMadera, with the support of the Ecuadoran Ministry of Health and the Pinchot Institute, raised funds to build, furnish, and equip Cristóbal Colón's first health care clinic and secure a full-time nurse and part-time physician. "Health is a basic human right and a goal onto itself," wrote Ariel Pinchot, one of Peter Pinchot's children and coauthor of the study. "However, good health is also vital from a systemic perspective, without which poverty alleviation and natural resource conservation cannot occur. Healthy families and healthy forests are intimately connected, and one cannot hope to achieve either without addressing health conditions and the degradation of natural resources concurrently."¹⁹

HUMAN CONSERVATION IN OREGON

Ariel Pinchot's paternal great-grandparents made similar claims 80 years earlier. As part of their response to the devastation of Pennsylvania's forest cover and the economic collapse of the Great Depression, Governor Gifford Pinchot and the commonwealth's First Lady, Cornelia Pinchot, promoted what they called "human conservation." Simply put, there could be no economic recovery if the working and living conditions of the state's most impoverished residents were not stabilized, and there could be no sustained recovery if Penn's Woods were not regenerated. Social justice, economic development, and public health went hand-in-hand, they argued, an argument as true in Pennsylvania in the 1930s as it is in twenty-first-century Ecuador.²⁰

These intertwined aspirations are shaping the Pinchot Institute's work in Vernonia, Oregon, a community of 2,300 residents inhabiting a narrow valley in the Coastal Range through which the flood-prone Nehalem River flows. Located in Columbia County, in the northwest corner of the state, Vernonia is "a gritty little timber town that was once home to the largest electric sawmill in the world"; the name of its high school athletic teams, the

Mighty Loggers, recalls the community's original economic base. Although surrounded, as county commissioner Tony Hyde observes, by "28 miles of forests in all directions," Vernonia confronts double-digit unemployment and a high level of poverty; resource rich, the community is decidedly cash poor. This imbalance is not unusual among rural, mountainous, and forested communities scattered across the nation. It shares as well another dilemma facing these towns: a little over half of the forests in the United States are privately owned, the majority of these lands are the property of individuals or families, and nearly 50 percent of these owners are over 62 years old. It is this aging population that in Vernonia and elsewhere controls a significant portion of the country's forested ecosystems. Over the next two decades, some portion of these lands will be sold to sustain their owners' health and welfare. As in Ecuador, timber will serve as a form of health care insurance. Upon their owners' deaths, these woodlands may be sold to pay off debts or transferred to the next generation.²¹

The implications of this developing situation drive the research of Brett Butler, a social scientist working for the U.S. Forest Service. He and his colleagues have identified ownership patterns across the country, surveyed current owners about their intentions for the wooded lands they own, and assessed their future management plans and prospects for the sale, bequest, or donation of these properties. The key, Butler argues, is to understand how family forest owners perceive their lands:

Despite what some of us might have learned in forestry school, timber production is not the primary reason that families own land. Rather, the most important reasons ... are related to the aesthetics and privacy the land provides and its importance as part of their family legacy. "Aesthetics" is shorthand for the enjoyment owners get from many facets of the land—the trees, the wildlife, everything about it. Many owners have a primary or secondary residence on their land and greatly value the privacy and solitude their forests provide. "Legacy" is their ability to pass the land on to the next generation: many owners have inherited the land from their parents or other relatives and would like to do the same for future generations.

But will they hand off their legacy to their progeny, and will these legatees be willing and able to maintain these woods as woods? With an estimated 6,000 forested acres a day being sold off in the United States—and this may be just the beginning of what is predicted to be the largest intergenerational land transfer in American history—the shift in ownership could constrain the capacity of these woodlands to provide essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, amid a changing climate.²²

These linked and troubling issues serve as the foundation of the Forest Health–Human Health Initiative that the Pinchot Institute launched in Vernonia in 2010. Senior Fellow Catherine Mater surveyed the parents and the rising generation about how they expect to manage their legacy properties. Her interviewees confirmed Butler's studies indicating that health care, and its costs, were their number-one worry. This was compounded in Vernonia, where 80 percent of the parents and their adult children interviewed did not have "long-term health insurance and no plan in place to address this health care need." Instead, both cohorts expected to use timber resources to pay for emergency or sustained care.²³

Those same trees could offer a different, more sustainable resolution. Oregon State University researchers inventoried the lands in question and discovered that "a majority of these forests are at

an opportune time in their growth cycle from a carbon storage perspective, with more than 5,000 acres of these coastal Douglas-fir dominant forests being comprised of trees 30 years old or younger.” Asked whether they would consider participating in a “carbon for health care program”—the landowners would manage their woods to increase their carbon storage potential, and outside investors would purchase this increase in the form of carbon credits, providing an income stream targeted for the owners’ health care—the majority of those Vernonians surveyed expressed considerable interest. The Forest Health–Human Health Initiative was born.²⁴

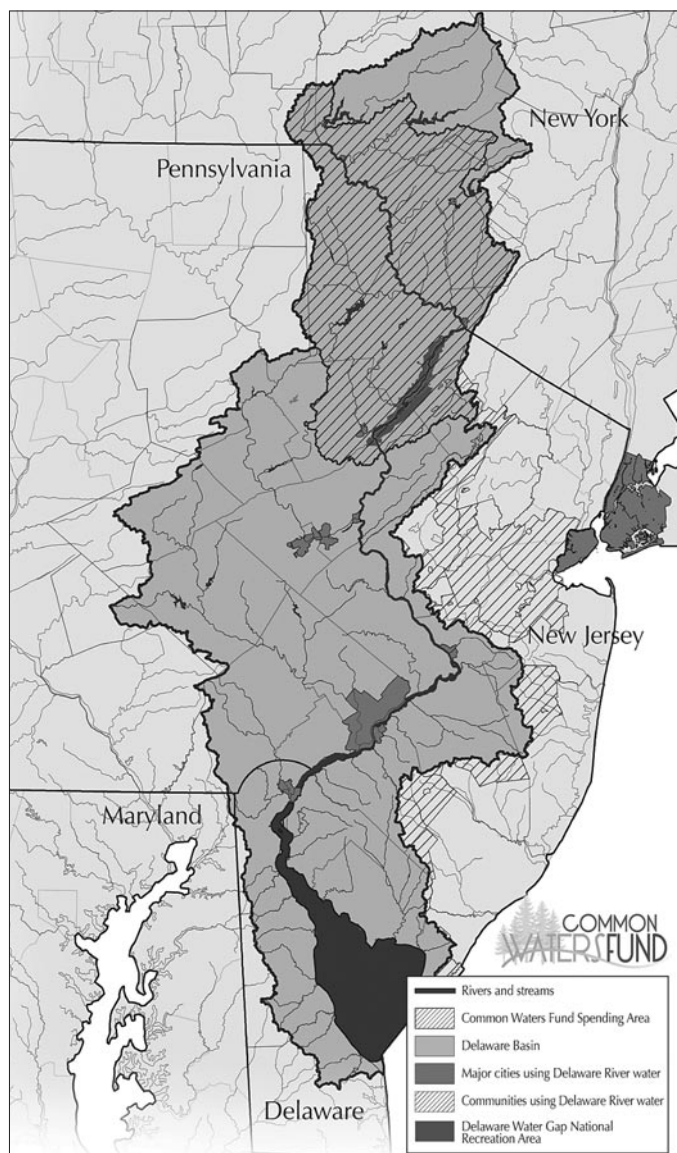
It is the first project in the nation that exchanges forest carbon for direct payments to landowners and surrounding communities. With seed funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield, and the Kelley Family Foundation, the Pinchot Institute has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the American Carbon Registry to serve as an official site for carbon credits in the pilot project and developed a specialized debit card, called the ATreeM card, coded so that carbon-credit dollars can be used only for health care expenses. As of early 2013, the Institute was in the final stages of developing marketing portfolios for carbon investors from the health care sector, such as hospital systems, health-care insurance companies, and pharmaceutical corporations. “We believe investors will be willing to pay more for carbon credits,” Mater has noted, “that are linked to quantifiable social benefits coming in the form of direct payments to health care accounts for landowners and rural communities.” If so, then projects weaving together ecosystem services, public health, and rural sustainability could prove a dynamic combination transferable to other regions and conditions.²⁵

WATER CONSERVATION IN THE NORTHEAST

A similarly complex connection between environmental health, water quality, and landscape restoration informs Common Waters, an initiative that seeks to address a critical challenge facing the sprawling 13,500-square-mile watershed of the Delaware River. The region is imperiled because the “great forested landscapes of the Northeast and the critical watersheds they contain are facing death by a thousand cuts.” Metropolitan New York and Philadelphia have continued to sprawl outward toward such communities as Milford, in northeastern Pike County, Pennsylvania. That is not the only reason that the local forests are being harvested and bulldozed. Private woodlands owners along the upper Delaware, like their peers in Columbia County, Oregon, are older and likely to cut timber to pay for health care costs or unexpected expenses. Land sales and the resulting parcelization are decreasing tree cover, adding to water treatment costs downstream. Conversely, extending forest cover has clear benefits: “For every 10 percent increase in forest cover in the headwaters, water treatment costs are decreased by 20 percent.” To secure this savings requires that those who own woodland and those who need clean water realize their shared interest in these paired resources.²⁶

The Pinchot Institute has been the coordinator of the project since 2007; ever since, it began enlisting support for the Common Waters Fund from

The Delaware River supplies more than 16 million people with pure drinking water.



The Delaware River Basin drains approximately 13,500 square miles in five states.





Under the direction of Al Sample (left), the Pinchot Institute has evolved into a nonprofit think-and-do tank by getting out on the land.

more than 40 state, county, and town agencies, regional authorities, nonprofits, land trusts, and foundations. The Common Waters idea emerged from an initial request of the Pinchot Institute to facilitate a meeting between the Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area and adjacent property owners. The park's leaders realized that their management decisions depended on how the park's neighbors were managing their lands, but none of the various entities or individuals were talking to each other. The conversation began at Grey Towers that fall, and the assembled group decided that the Chicago Wilderness project offered the best template for the Delaware watershed initiative. The Chicago Wilderness project embraces a tristate area, covering portions of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, and has built a 260-member coalition binding together urban and rural interests. Its mission is "to restore local nature and improve the quality of life for all living things, by protecting the lands and waters on which we all depend," and its actions testify to the capacity of voluntary partnerships to transcend political, social, and demographic boundaries and implement essential environmental protections.²⁷

This bottom-up strategy is in marked contrast to the top-down bioregional agencies that the federal and state governments promoted in the 1950s and 1960s. Such intergovernmental ventures, such as the Delaware River Basin Commission that President Kennedy signed into law in 1961, left "political actors free to play their own game without the counterweight of a focused public opinion." Shifting away from this insular orientation has immense appeal to Eric Snyder, planning director of Sussex County, New Jersey, who decries the "Balkanized land-use decision-making environment" in which he and his colleagues for too long had operated. "We've so many agencies involved and each has its own

legislative mandates [and] limits of jurisdiction. It's really difficult for anything other than chaos to come out of it. In Common Waters, we've got some people with the right idea," a more nimble approach that can "break down some of those barriers."²⁸

To nurture such regional collaborations, the Pinchot Institute has raised money to underwrite the Common Waters Partnership and the eponymous fund. Realizing, in the words of former Grey Towers director Edgar Brannon, that "the health of our regional economy is very much tied to the quality of the living environment," the fund commenced investing its dollars—to date more than \$700,000 has been released—as incentives to promote "water-friendly" forest management, underwrite conservation easements to preserve forest cover, and improve the "finances of forest ownership so families can afford to keep their forests as forests." As in Ecuador and the Pacific Northwest, the ambition of the Common Waters project is to sustain the land and the people who make it their home.²⁹

The project's advantages for the Carr-Dreher Farm in Sterling, Pennsylvania, are a case in point. The 79-acre family-owned forest, sitting on one of the highest points of the Pocono Mountains, is draped over two ridges and lies within the upper reaches of Butternut Creek. The site's elevation is one factor complicating its restoration: high winds and ice storms periodically damage the upcountry woodlands, already weakened from insect infestations and extensive deer browsing that has eliminated natural regeneration. Moreover, the landscape has been a working blue-stone quarry since the early twentieth century. With the death of the family patriarch, ownership passed to his two daughters and their families, who then faced a difficult dilemma—either sell off the land and forgo its future income, or try to restore it despite their lack of resources. The county forester, who was linked into the Common Waters project, made it possible for the family to take the path of most beneficence. After a formal assessment of their property's damaged condition, and following a successful application for Common Waters dollars, the Carr-Dreheres were able to hire a consulting forester to develop a stewardship plan. With additional funding and tax relief from a variety of county, state, and federal entities, they are clearing away rock and logging debris and controlling invasive species to encourage the regeneration of the native maple-beech-cherry forest. For all the satisfaction that family has gained in repairing the land and its integrity one acre at a time, it has also derived satisfaction knowing that these environmental gains are not theirs alone. Their commitment upstream, in the words of Gary Carr, has given "the gift of guaranteed clean water to the millions downstream in the Delaware Valley whom we will never know or meet."³⁰

Proponents of EcoMadera and the Forest Health–Human Health Initiative could easily echo this assertion, which also undergirds much of the Pinchot Institute's recent activism. Weaving together different coalitions to meet the diverse needs—technical, environmental, social, and financial—of the residents of Cristóbal Colón, Vernonia, and the headwaters of the Delaware River has strengthened biotic and human communities. In one sense that end result is a far cry from the Pinchot Institute's original mission of the 1960s, which was framed around the need to advance conservation education in the immediate aftershock of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Yet it is also consistent with the larger idea of helping Americans comprehend their obligation to enhance the health of people and places, make the planet more habitable, and ensure a new greatest good for the long run. □

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NOTES

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